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# AUNT SALLY'S BAG

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# Aunt Sally's Bag.

"I declare, 'Nijah, it beats me to know just how the Lord wants us to take things! Now, look at this verse. What do you 'spose it means?" And Aunt Sally, her finger still fixed on the verse in question, held out her Bible to her husband.

The passage was this, "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountain; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon."

If there was one thing Adonijah Fellows felt he had cause to be prond of, it was his knowledge of the Holy Word and the power to expound its meaning.

So, at his wife's question he drew out his glasses, adjusted them firmly to his nose, and taking the book from her hand, carefully scanned the words she had pointed out.

Aunt Sally,—for so everyone called her—leaned back in her chair waiting expectantly for the explanation she felt sure would come.

"Well Sally," Uncle 'Nijah said at length, "that's a scriptooral statement—"

"Of course, I know that," interrupted Aunt Sally, "but it don't hold to reason, if it is."

"Well, as I was 'lowing to say," Uncle 'Nijah resumed, "it's a kind of picture and doesn't mean real corn. I tell you, Sally, I'd like to hev seen them cedars on Lebanon when the wind shuck 'em back'ards and for'ards. Why, you could hev heard the roar of 'em clear down to the sea. I declare, it must have been a purty sight!" And 'Nijah Fellows lapsed into the silence of thought, and in imagination was wafted into the very presence of Lebanon's stately forests. From this little mental excursion, practical Aunt Sally brought him back to the question in hand.

"For the life of me, 'Nijah, I can't see what you're aiming at. I don't care nothing about them forests,—it's the corn that puzzles me."

"I tell you Sally, that's a wonderful verse. It's just as plain in my mind as anything."

"But 'Nijah! whoever heerd before of plantin' corn on the top of a mountain! Why, there isn't a farmer, far or near, who doesn't know it takes the very best bottom land for that."

"Now Sally, I advise you to hold on a minit,—you're jedgin' too fast. As I was sayin', it doesn't mean *real* corn—but the Gospel. Of course even that will grow better in good, rich bottom land than 'twill on top of a mountin'. But that's neither hither nor yon to us; for if the Lord wants it planted on top of a mountin', its our business to do the work just how and where He tells us, and it's His business to see after its growin'. And ye may take my word for it, if He wants to make

everyone of them stalks grow higher than the biggest cedar on Lebanon, why then He's goin' to do it, and nobody need trouble themselves to hender. But how did you get hold of that verse, Sally?"

"Why, down to the meetin' yesterday,—you know it was our annual—Mis' Stem she read that verse, and she 'lowed that in our society a good deal of corn must have been planted that didn't come up, and she said the few little stalks we had raised, didn't look as if they'd make much of a showin' in Lebanon. I didn't rightly understand what she meant, and so, 'lowed I'd come home and study over it a bit."

Silence fell between them, and for a long time Aunt Sally sat looking intently into the bright wood fire that flamed up in the old-fashioned fireplace. Her husband, reposing in his easy chair, left her to her thoughts. Suddenly, Aunt Sally broke the silence.

"'Nijah, doesn't it say if you *plant* the corn it *shall* come up?"

"Now Sally, it's like this. It says,—there shall be a han'ful of corn *in* the earth. Now, if it's *in* the earth, somebody must hev put it there, mustn't they? Of course. Then it goes on to say,—that han'ful of corn *shall* grow 'till it's big and strong enough to shake like Lebanon. Now Sally, that's what the Lord means in that verse."

"But 'Nijah, what if you didn't plant the corn?"

"Well Sally, I've heerd of air-plants, but corn's not one of 'em, not by a good deal. I never hed a crop of corn I didn't look for, and I always 'lowed the plantin' was about the most particular part of the hull work. And then, when it come up I had to follow right along, and be ready when some sly worm nipped off a stalk, to drop in another seed that 'ud come on in time for fodder, anyway."

Long before the end of this dissertation was reached, Aunt Sally was busy with an entirely different train of thought. Reaching over, she took the Bible her husband had been holding, and slowly read the verse, following the lines with her finger. Twice she went over it. Then she closed the book, crossed the room and placed it on the shelf where it always lay. Returning to her place, she fell again into deep thought. The old clock in the corner ticked an accompaniment to the crackling of the logs on the fire, but no other sound broke the stillness. Uncle 'Nijah, knowing that until her mind was fully settled, to attempt further conversation would be useless, waited quietly. At last, Aunt Sally straightened herself in her chair.

"It's all clear now, 'Nijah," she said.

"Well, and how did you settle it?"

'This way, 'Nijah. That corn *is* the Gospel—that's plain. Them mountin' tops are the darkest, hardest places of our land, and that shakin' of Lebanon must be a picture of God's Hand gettin'

hold of and shaking them very places. But 'Nijah, He can't do it unless the corn has *been planted* there, for He says Himself, *that's* what's going to be shuk."

"That's right, Sally,—"

"Jest wait a bit 'Nijah, that isn't all. God made them mountin's to suit Himself, and He gives us the corn and tells us to go up there and plant it; and we're not to hang back on account of the thin soil, and the rocks, nor spend any time advising Him, or waitin' for Him to get our views about the best places for cornfields."

"That's right, Sally, exactly right."

"Now 'Nijah, I've been thinkin' about our society. The truth is, we've corn,—plenty of it,—good and fresh too from the dear Lord's hands, and we just haven't taken the trouble to plant it. Then, we get together and wonder and wonder *why* that corn doesn't come up. I tell you, 'Nijah, it's a burnin' shame the way we treat the Lord."

"But Sally, don't feel so about it. The Lord's work will go on without us."

"No 'Nijah, it doesn't. You always say that, but—it doesn't, and to my mind, the Lord never for one minute meant it should. Why he says right out that we're to be '*workers*' with him,—that's the very word, '*workers*.' And you know He told those people of Layodicy just how He felt like treatin' shirkers."

"Now 'Nijah, you needn't say a word for I'm goin', if I hev to walk, but I want you to hitch up.

I'm goin' down to Mis' Stem's, and I shall tell her that I've got a bag full of corn that I've been carrying this whole year, and hev never planted a kernel of."

Aunt Sally took down from its nail the black satin bag that always went with her to the missionary meetings, and turned its contents upon the table beside her astonished husband.

"Look at it 'Nijah, take a good look. Here's a list of persons to be talked to, to get 'em interested. Haven't seen one of 'em,—*not one.* Look at them leaflets! Some of 'em Mis' Stem bought out of her slender purse, and give 'em to us, and begged us to read and pass 'em on. Some of 'em were free,—direct from headquarters, and we didn't even pay postage on 'em,—sent to us to study and plan by and then to be passed on. These got as far as my bag and there they stuck. And I declare, 'Nijah look at this! Oh! this is dreadful!"

Aunt Sally sat down, completely exhausted, and it was evident the tears were close behind her eyes, and in another moment would gush forth. Uncle 'Nijah hastened to the rescue.

"Now, Sally, chirk up. We don't none of us do as well as we might."

"It's no use to say that to me, for I haven't done anything,—not a thing. And I have had the corn so long!"

"But, Sally, corn don't ever git too old to grow."

"That isn't it, 'Nijah. It's the way we've

abused the Lord that hurts me. He gave us the seed, free of charge, and showed us the ground, but we wouldn't take the trouble to drop it in. And then we got together time after time and begged and prayed the Lord to 'send showers of blessin' on that seed.' And we wondered and fretted because it didn't grow, and all the time we had it in our bags."

"What's this, Sally?" interrupted Uncle 'Nijah, holding up a little red blank book.

"Oh don't, 'Nijah, that's the worst of all. I cannot, cannot look at that. Poor Mis' Stem! She never dreamed what a woman she had to deal with when she giv' me that!"

Uncle 'Nijah opened the little book, scanned its pages closely, while Aunt Sally kept up a rapid rocking.

"Why Sally," he said, "you make too much of this. I don't see anything here but just names."

"Of course not, for you don't understand. Them's the names of teachers in our mission schools,—poor things, away off from home,—just thirty of 'em, one for each day in the month. And we took them books and all stood up and promised we'd pray for one of them women every day. And I,—I kept on about a month, and then the fall cleanin' came on and I slipped the book in the bag with the rest of my corn, and forgot it. Oh 'Nijah! I actu'ly believe I'm falling from grace, and I a Presbyterian too. But I must start, right away."

"You don't really mean you're goin' to Mis' Stem's to-day? It's awful cold and blustry, and the wind cuts like a whip."

"Yes, I mean just that, and more, I'd be glad to hev the wind cut me. It would be a comfort to be a real heathen and hev to go the whole way barefooted over sharp thorns."

"But I don't see what Mis' Stem can do about it."

"No, I expect not. But I'm goin' to hev her call a meetin',—a meetin' of our society,—right away. And I'll tell 'em the exact truth. Yes, I'm goin' to tell 'em that whether we knowed it or not, every time the Lord looked down on us sittin' there, singin' and prayin' together, with all His corn hid in our bags, He must hev thought we was little better than a passel of hypocrites. Far as I'm concerned, I jedge He was about right. But one thing you may reckon on sure. He'll not catch me that way again!"

Uncle 'Nijah looked into his wife's eyes for a minute. A queer little twinkle shone in his own; then, with a low whistle, he arose, put on his hat and started for the barn.

Left alone, the weight of the task she had imposed upon herself seemed to increase, and Aunt Sally paced up and down the room with quick, nervous step. "I don't want to do this," she said to herself. "I really don't. But something's got to be done. I wish I had one of them ram's horns like Joshway had. I'd rather walk 'round tootin' that for seven days than to get up

and speak in meetin'. But I've got to go ahead now, and I will. I trust if the Lord was willin' to do sech a mighty shakin' by means of them foolish horns, that he won't object to doin' a little stirrin' through me. I feel sure I hear Him callin' uv me to go, yet it's awful queer that He'd send Aunt Sally Fellows to make a speech in meetin'."

But the rockaway, with a bountiful supply of blankets, was at the door, and Aunt Sally hastened to make ready for the cold drive. She declined her husband's offer to go with her, assuring him she saw no reason why he should suffer for her misdeeds. Uncle 'Nijah watched her as she drove down the hill and was lost from sight in the valley below. "I do declare," he said, "she was powerfully stirred up, and she is always so quiet and timersome like. But when I saw her eyes aflashin', I thought I'd better keep quiet. I don't like to meddle when the Lord's takin' scales off folks' eyes. But I do hope she won't catch her death o' cold."

It seemed to Aunt Sally, as she drove along, that Dolly's pace had never been so slow, nor the distance so great. When at last her destination was reached, and she had requested Mrs. Stem to call a meeting from the pulpit the following day, and had given her reason for it, even that good lady "feared people would think it queer," and the thought flashed upon her mind that perhaps Mrs. Fellows was under the spell of some delusion. So unaccustomed are we to hastening in the

"King's business," that when one is found so doing, it is apt to be attributed to some other prompting than deep interest in His cause. However, the call was written and given into Aunt Sally's charge for announcement the following day.

"Now, Mis' Stem," said Aunt Sally, her errand finished, "I've a bit of time to spare and I'll call and invite some of our women to come to the meetin', and when they git there, if you don't mind, I'm goin' to tell 'em the whole story of my 'han'ful of corn,' and I'll ask each one of 'em to stand right up and tell what they have done with theirs. I reckon it didn't take as many grains to make a han'ful for me as it did for some of them, for I'm just a plain woman,—always lived on a farm, and never learned the fine things you town people think of. I haven't what you call 'talents,' and you'd never think of askin' me even to pray in a meetin' if any company was there. And as for speakin'—well, I allow it's all I can do to talk to the Lord with my eyes shet, let alone standin' up and facin' a meetin'. But Mis' Stem, I'm goin' to now. Mebby it isn't jest the season for plantin' corn, but if we've got any that belongs to the Lord hidden away, why I'm goin' to get it, and hev it put where it'll begin sproutin'. For I tell you Mis' Stem, jest as plain as I see you, I saw the blessed Lord Jesus standin' before me. Oh, there was such a sad look in His eyes! And I'd jest been askin' thet He'd take the seed we'd

been storin' all these months and years, and would make it spring up and bear a wonderful crop. Then, with that look still in His eyes, He said to me,—Sally Fellows, how much seed hev you sowed?"

"He didn't take His eyes off my face, but I knew in my heart He was looking right through me into that bag. And He knew, how, many and many a time I'd gone to the meetin', and hed set there, so serious and interested lookin' and hed gone away promisin' I'd plant a few seeds for Him every day; but instead I'd get so taken up with my work, and the farm, and 'Nijah's crops, that I wouldn't think about it 'till the bell rang for another missionary meetin'. Of course I'd come to that, and would join in the exercises so whole-souled like, never thinkin' I wasn't any better than Ananias and Sapphiry, in the Lord's eyes. But I'm glad He's found the whole story out, and I'm glad you know it too, Mis' Stem, and I'll be awful relieved when I've told it to the rest."

But little remains to be told. Word was whispered about that something "queer" was going to happen at the "called Meeting" of the Missionary Society. So, not only were the members present at roll call, but also a goodly number who had responded to Aunt Sally's personal invitation.

I need go into but few details of the meeting, but it was a never-to-be-forgotten occasion. True to her word, Aunt Sally told her story, sparing herself not in the least. Then, she called upon

each one present to give account of the trust committed to them.

The revelation was a startling one. Heads were bowed, hearts overflowed, for not one could say, "I have sacredly kept the trust. I have brought '*all* the tithes into the storehouse.'" But as the dear Master will always do when we come to Him in heart-felt penitence, with His healing-rod of forgiveness, He smote the fountains made bitter by grief and shame, and they became sweet, and the waters that gushed forth freshened and revived the whole church.

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Sitting one day in a friend's parlor where a number of ladies had gathered, the story of "Aunt Sally's Bag" was alluded to, and I was asked to repeat it, which I did just as I have told it to you. When I had concluded, each, in a merry, laughing way began to name the bag that held her "corn."

"Mine is an embroidery bag," said one.

"And mine a housekeeper's bag," said another.

"I'll have to confess to owning a society bag," said the third.

And so the laughing talk passed around the room. At last, a dainty little lady sitting near me said, "I believe I have more than one bag, indeed I've quite a string of them, and they might all be called ragbags of selfishness,—and I dislike to think that the dear Lord really does look into any one of them."

In the hush that followed, she turned to me and

said, "can you not give some remedy for stilling these consciences of ours that your story has troubled?" Again there was a little silence and the confessed owner of the ragbags, looking into my face, continued, "I do want to empty out everyone of my old bags, and carefully gathering up every grain of the Lord's precious corn sow it at once, but I'm afraid I cannot. Do you not think it would help if we should all join hands as a pledge to make the attempt?"

I gladly took the hand she extended; others joined us until we stood, unbroken links of a chain pledged to empty ourselves of self, praying that God would take the "handful of corn" planted by our weak hands, and make it grow until "the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon."

EMMA P. TREAT.

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